### State Board of Education

## Policy Development Priorities / Leadership Agenda 2010 – 2011

# State Board Policy Development Priorities DRAFT – NOTES

As the world continues to change, we must continuously assess our education system to assure that we are preparing students for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Advances in technology and globalization are changing the way we live, connect with each other, communicate, and work. We dare not rely on the same traditional school system, but must adapt in order to prepare our students for the world of today and the future.

In order to facilitate these changes, the State Board of Education has spent the last year focusing on the policy development priorities of Innovation, Engagement, and Quality. The Board has looked at innovative practices within and beyond lowa; how to engage communities, parents and educators to get them to understand and embrace the need for change and improvement; and the challenge of maintaining quality while trying new ways of doing things. All of this has been focused on the Board's goal of improving instruction in order to increase learning and achievement for all students.

Over the coming year, the Board would like to bore deeper and explore some specific strategies that could transform education and increase student achievement.

A number of issues were discussed:

<u>Competency-based instruction</u>. "Learning is the constant; time is the variable." Moving away from seat time to competency based instruction/learning would be transformative. This is a positive approach and could lead to substantial education reform, but it would be very complex – many issues would need to be addressed.

• Online learning opportunities. There are many implications for increasing access to online learning opportunities for students and teachers in lowa. Online learning truly makes education an "anytime / anyplace" process. It equalizes opportunities across the state by allowing all students access to a broad array of courses, teachers, experts, and resources. It assists with learning retention by providing ongoing learning opportunities through the summer and school breaks. It allows students to follow their passions, to apply learning to real life situations, and to become part of a broader learning community. It also supports teachers with additional professional development opportunities and allows them to network with other professionals in the same discipline.

There are many different models for providing online learning. In order to facilitate comprehensive online learning in Iowa, policy and the governance structure across all sectors, funding, and quality would need to be addressed.

- Reducing achievement gaps. We have been talking about achievement gaps for a long time, but are still not seeing the gains we need in this area. Minority students and students with disabilities continue to fall through the cracks. We must raise expectations for these students, provide teachers with new teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs, modify the structure of schools to recognize that all students do not learn at the same pace, and continue to create a sense of urgency about the need to address this issue.
- Addressing the challenges of rural districts with declining enrollment. As
  long as enrollment continues to decline in some areas of the state, more
  and more local school districts will find themselves facing a financial crisis.
  Long-term enrollment trends and geography, as well as distance learning
  opportunities, must be considered in developing the best educational
  experiences for every student in the state.

#### Additional thoughts – tying it all together:

- Moving away from seat time to evidence of performance is truly transformative....it could change the way the entire the education system operates.
- Moving from seat time to evidence of performance is a <u>positive</u> step (it focuses on the positive rather than using threats and compliance as the means of leveraging change).
- A policy move from seat time to evidence of performance does the following:
  - Aligns with the Race to the Top application.
  - Links directly to the Iowa Core (or Common Core) since it would directly address student proficiency in the essential concepts and skills of Iowa/Common Core.
  - Links directly to the summative assessment measures of the Common Core that are currently under development.
  - Presents an opportunity for the State Board to work with higher education since a move from Carnegie units to some other proficiency measure will require cooperation from higher education.
  - Could align to the student records data warehouse student transcript work.
- Online learning supports a move to competency-based instruction. Online courses could lead the way as examples because online courses are not reliant upon "seat time." A student takes as much time as s/he needs to progress through a course. Students who need more time/assistance (learning is the constant and time is the variable) have that opportunity. Learners who can progress more rapidly can do so in the online class environment.
- A move away from seat time to proficiency could allow more teacher attention for students with learning needs. There would be less teacher pressure to "move on" before students have mastered the material. This would be especially beneficial in trying to eliminate the achievement gap.

- Additional online courses also increase learning opportunities for students across the state, including those in districts with declining enrollment that have fewer resources for instruction.
- The technology conversation remains front and center. To achieve the management of resources and to ensure students are meeting benchmarks of achievement, technology-powered learning will be key.

### Next Steps - Building a Plan of Study and Action

As the State Board discussed next steps and a plan of action, they considered three screening questions to help focus their efforts during the coming year on their overarching goal of increasing student achievement:

- 1. Which potential actions are <u>mission critical</u> and will affect the <u>quality</u> of 21<sup>st</sup> century education for lowa students?
- 2. Which potential actions <u>need</u> State Board attention?
- 3. Which potential actions will be <u>strategic</u> and yet sufficiently <u>focused</u> and will likely "leverage" other changes (as well as build a coalition among other key players to move the effort forward)?

The following next steps were mentioned at the State Board retreat. After review and further discussion at the July State Board meeting, a plan of study and action will be developed for the coming year.

- 1. More information is needed about competency based instruction. Build sessions into the State Board meeting agendas over the coming year to address:
  - What is competency-based instruction? How does it fit with the lowa Core? What's going on in lowa?
  - What's happening across the nation? Bring in an expert on competency-based instruction to discuss. What does the research show?
  - What kinds of policy changes, coalition building, training, resources, assessment, etc., will be needed in order to move forward with competency-based instruction?

- 2. More information is needed about models for online learning.
  - Schedule sessions at State Board meetings to learn more about the different models and the policy, governance structure, training, resource and quality issues that would need to be addressed to increase online learning opportunities.
  - Consider online learning opportunities for both students and professionals.
- 3. Revisit the recommendations from the Technology Task Force report to determine which recommendations the Board would like to address at this time.
  - Ask the Technology Task Force to continue to provide guidance on technology and instructional policy.
- 4. Develop a communication strategy.
  - It's a key piece that can weave all these areas together we need a new "mental model." What does a learning environment look like? Learning does not all occur within the four walls of a classroom.
  - Communication is the lens for the action plan who to talk with, how to focus attention on this.
  - Raise the level of awareness by talking about these issues, educating people.
- 5. Collaborate across the education community and with other agencies.
  - Build coalitions.
- 6. Involve higher education in these conversations.
- 7. Teacher preparation are we holding them accountable? Are they:
  - Preparing teachers for the new learning culture?
  - Preparing teachers to integrate technology into teaching and learning?
  - Providing teachers with the skills to teach at a distance?
- 8. Ask the Department to identify districts that are making a difference and invite them to present at State Board meetings.
- 9. Meet with legislators on the education committees.

- 10. Advocate using limited resources strategically, and eliminating unnecessary programs or activities.
- 11. Use the AEAs as the delivery system for professional development.